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CINCSO FOR INTAFF, CINCLANT FOR POLAD

E.O. 12356: DECL:OADR

TAGS: PGOV, SHUM, AR

SUBJ: ALFONSIN DEFENDS RULE OF LAW, CRITICIZES MOTHERS,
REASSURES MILITARY

1. SUMMARY: IN A KEY SPEECH ON JANUARY 18, PRESIDENT ALFONSIN TOOK AIM AT THOSE HE CONSIDERS THE ENEMIES OF DEMOCRACY: EXTREMISTS OF LEFT AND RIGHT WHO PROVOKE VIOLENCE IN ORDER TO DISCREDIT THE DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM, AND THOSE WHO WOULD REJECT THE SYSTEM OF JUSTICE AND DUE PROCESS (READ THE LEFT AND THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO). HE ALSO ISSUED A REMINDER THAT HE IS ARMED FORCES COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, AND A WARNING TO RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS TO REFRAIN FROM PUBLIC STATEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES WHICH SMACK OF DESTABILIZATION INTENTIONS ("GOLPISMO"). ALTHOUGH MOST OF THE PRESS BILLED ALFONSIN'S SPEECH AS A CONDEMNATION OF COUP PLOTTERS AND EXTREMISTS, WHICH IT WAS, WE THINK HIS PRINCIPAL OBJECTIVES WERE DEFENSE OF THE RULE OF LAW AND CRITICISM OF THE LEFT AND THE MOTHERS. THIS WILL REASSURE THE MILITARY, AMONG OTHERS, THAT THERE IS PLENTY OF DISTANCE BETWEEN HIM AND THE LEFT, AND THAT THOSE INVOLVED IN THE DIRTY WAR WILL BE TRIED ACCORDING TO THE ESTABLISHED SYSTEM, I.E., IN MILITARY COURTS, AT LEAST IN THE FIRST INSTANCE. END SUMMARY.

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2. (U) THE SPEECH, MADE AT A CEREMONY COMMEMORATING THE DEATH OF FORMER PRESIDENT ARTURO ILLIA, WAS DEVOTED TO THE THEME OF PRESERVING AND PROMOTING DEMOCRACY. FOLLOWING EFFUSIVE PRAISE OF ILLIA'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO DEMOCRACY AND SOCIAL PROGRESS, ALFONSIN LAUNCHED INTO DENUNCIATIONS OF THOSE WHOM HE CONSIDERS ITS ENEMIES. "ABSURD MINORITIES DO NOT UNDERSTAND THE REASON FOR OUR (DEMOCRATIC) STRUGGLE. . . , THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN THE RULE OF LAW IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE PEACE AND JUSTICE." "THERE WILL BE MINISCULE ELEMENTS THAT. . . ATTEMPT TO EXPLOIT THIS PERIOD OF RECONCILIATION, OF JUSTICE AND OF TRUTH WITH OTHER AIMS. WHAT IS DEMOCRATIC ABOUT ASSAULTS ON CITIZENS WHO GO TO COURT TO TESTIFY?" (AN ALLUSION TO RECENT PHYSICAL ASSAULTS ON SEVERAL MILITARY OFFICERS BY THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO AND LEFTIST YOUTHS ASSOCIATED WITH THEM). "IS THIS DONE IN THE NAME OF DEMOCRACY? LIES! ARE THEY ACTING IN THE NAME OF JUSTICE? FALSE! THAT IS THE JUSTICE OF POPULAR TRIBUNALS AND THE FIRING SQUAD, NOT OF THE RULE OF LAW."

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3. (U) TURNING TO POLITICAL EXTREMISTS, WHO ARE APPARENTLY RESPONSIBLE FOR A SHARP RISE IN VIOLENCE IN RECENT WEEKS, ALFONSIN SAID "WE ARE ALSO GOING TO HAVE TO OVERCOME THE CONFUSION OF. . .THE DRASTIC LEFT AND THE SECTARIAN RIGHT, (EACH ONE) HOPING TO PROVOKE A CONFRONTATION DURING THIS MOMENT OF ARGENTINE RECOVERY AND HOPE, LIKE SOME SINISTER MIRROR REFLECTING THOSE PAST INIQUITIES THAT BROUGHT US TO A GRAVE NATIONAL CRISIS."

4. (U) ARGENTINES MUST ACTIVELY SUSTAIN DEMOCRACY, SAID ALFONSIN; THEY "DO NOT HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE A SILENT MAJORITY AT THIS TIME." ON THE OTHER HAND, AS "COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE ARMED FORCES, I AM NOT GOING TO IMPOSE NORMS OF AUTHORITARIAN DISCIPLINE THAT HERETOFORE IMPEDED RETIRED OFFICERS TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES FREELY. . . (AN ALLUSION TO THE REQUIREMENT OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT THAT ALL MILITARY OFFICERS, INCLUDING RETIRED OFFICERS, MUST CLEAR PUBLIC SPEECHES AND STATEMENTS WITH THE PROPER AUTHORITIES.) ALTHOUGH THEY MUST KNOW THAT THERE ARE LIMITS BASED ON THE PENAL CODE AND THE GRAVEST CRIME AGAINST THE FATHERLAND IS THE COUP D'ETAT."

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5. A NUMBER OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS PROMPTED ALFONSIN TO SOUND THE ALARM ABOUT DANGERS TO DEMOCRACY. ANTI-SEMITIC INCIDENTS ARE ON THE INCREASE. (THERE WAS A CASE OF ARSON AGAINST A SYNAGOGUE IN ROSARIO THE FIRST WEEK OF JANUARY AND A CASE OF THEFT AND VANDALISM IN A BUENOS AIRES SYNAGOGUE THE SECOND WEEK.) THE PAPAL NUNCIATURE WAS THE TARGET OF A MOLOTOV COCKTAIL ATTACK. HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVISTS, INCLUDING THE MOTHERS OF THE PLAZA DE MAYO, PHYSICALLY ATTACKED SEVERAL CONGRESSMEN WHO VOTED FOR THE AMENDMENT TO THE CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE. THEY ALSO ASSAULTED, IN ONE CASE WITH BRICKS BROUGHT TO THE SCENE BY A YOUTH, SEVERAL RETIRED AND ACTIVE-DUTY MILITARY OFFICERS WHO WERE CALLED TO COURT TO TESTIFY ON DISAPPEARANCE CASES, AND FIGHTING BROKE OUT BETWEEN THE ACTIVISTS AND THE MILITARY OFFICERS' BODYGUARDS. MEANWHILE GANGS OF THUGS ASSAULTED PEOPLE AT AN ALARMING REATE IN THE SEASIDE RESORT CITY OF MAR DEL PLATA, NOW SWOLLEN WITH HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF TOURISTS. POLICE CLAIM THAT THE GANG ACTIVITIES SEEM TO BE WELL-PLANNED AND ORCHESTRATED, AND SUSPECT A POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IS BEHIND IT. MINISTER OF INTERIOR TROCCOLI DENOUNCED WHAT HE CALLED THE "BLACK HAND" OF THE EXTREMISTS WHO WANT TO DEMONSTRATE THAT DEMOCRATIC GOVERNMENT IS INCAPABLE OF PRESERVING ORDER.

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6. [REDACTED] APART FROM THE VIOLENCE, THE GOVERNMENT IS CONCERNED ABOUT INCREASING POLARIZATION, PARTICULARLY ON THE HUMAN RIGHTS FRONT. THE MOTHERS, SOME HUMAN RIGHTS LEADERS AND THE LEFT ARE NOT SATISFIED WITH THE SLOW AND CAREFUL WORKINGS OF DUE PROCESS IN THE COURT SYSTEM AND OF COURSE REJECT MILITARY COURTS MARTIAL. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE EXTREME RIGHT THINKS THAT THE PROCESS OF ACCOUNTING FOR THE DISAPPEARED HAS GONE TOO FAR ALREADY, WITH THE COURTS MARTIAL OF THE FIRST NINEE#JUNTA MEMBERS AND THE HUMILIATION OF SEEING OTHER PROMINENT MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY GOVERNMENT, SUCH AS FORMER PRESIDENT BIGNONE, JAILED. RUMORS ARE NOW CIRCULATING WIDELY, DISSEMINATED BY PERONISTS AMONG OTHERS, THAT ALFONSIN IS BEING LED BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS AND LEFTISTS IN HIS OWN PARTY INTO A WITCH HUNT AGAINST MILITARY OFFICERS AND AN ASSAULT ON THE ARMED FORCES INSTITUTIONS THEMSELVES. ALFONSIN IS TAKING STEPS TO REASSURE THE MILITARY OF THE FALSENESS OF THESE CHARGES WHILE SIMULTANEOUSLY EXERCISING HIS AUTHORITY AS COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF. ON JANUARY 14 HE MET FOR SEVERAL HOURS OVER A BARBEQUE WITH SENIOR ARMY OFFICIALS AT THE MILITARY'S HUGE INSTALLATION AT CAMPO DE MAYO AND SAID HE WOULD BE DOING THIS AND VISITING OTHER MILITARY INSTALLATIONS ON A REGULAR BASIS IN THE EXERCISE OF HIS CINC FUNCTION.

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7. [REDACTED] THUS, ALFONSIN'S PURPOSE WITH THE SPEECH WAS SEVERALFOLD. HE IS SEEKING THE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF THE LARGE MAJORITY OF ARGENTINES WHO WANT INTERNAL PEACE TO LAST AND DEMOCRACY TO SUCCEED. HE WANTS THEM TO REPUDIATE CALLS FOR EXTREMIST SOLUTIONS, INCLUDING IN THE HUMAN RIGHTS FIELD. MOREOVER, LIKE THE CHURCH, HE IS CALLING FOR RECONCILIATION. TO THE RECENTLY RETIRED MILITARY, DISGRUNTLED AT THEIR PLIGHT AND ALLEGEDLY GATHERING AMONG THEMSELVES TO COMPLAIN IF NOT TO PLOT HE ISSUED A STERN WARNING, BACKED UP BY THE RECENT ADMONISHMENT OF THE CURRENT COMMANDER OF V CORPS, GENERAL AGUADO BENITEZ, FOR STATEMENTS APPEARING IN THE PRESS TO THE EFFECT THAT THE GENERAL IS NOT AWARE OF ANY EXCESSES COMMITTED DURING THE "DIRTY WAR." TO THE ACTIVE-DUTY OFFICERS, WHO WERE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR DECISION-MAKING IN THE "DIRTY WAR," HIS MESSAGE WAS THAT HE IS NO FRIEND OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS EXTREMISTS AND THEY CAN BE ASSURED OF FAIR TREATMENT UNDER THE RULE OF LAW AND THE ESTABLISHED JUDICIAL SYSTEM. THIS IS DESIGNED TO REASSURE THEM THAT THEY WILL BE TRIED FAIRLY AND IN MILITARY COURTS, SUBJECT TO APPEAL TO CIVILIAN COURTS. RECENT PLEAS BY THE MINISTERS OF DEFENSE AND INTERIOR FOR EARLY CONGRESSIONAL ACTION ON THE AMENDMENT OF THE CODE OF MILITARY JUSTICE UNDERLINE THE GOVERNMENT'S DESIRE TO DEFUSE THE ISSUE OF ACCOUNTING FOR THE DISAPPEARED BY TRANSFERRING IT DEFINITELY TO THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM. ORTIZ**

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[REDACTED]